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4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM All Things Considered

STATION WETA Radio  
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SUBJECT Nicaragua Opposition Parties/International Help

RICHARD HARRIS: The opposition parties of Nicaragua are launching a campaign for international help. Their goal, to get a postponement of the elections now scheduled for November. The opposition parties are boycotting the elections because they feel the government is putting too many restrictions on the campaign. The government responded this week by outlawing the parties.

Alan Tomlinson reports from Managua.

ALAN TOMLINSON: The decision of the right-wing coalition, known as the Democratic Coordinating Group, not to take part in the elections under conditions it considers unfair has serious consequences for the abstaining parties. The National Council of Political Parties, which administers the electoral law in this instance, could have disbanded the three coalition parties entirely and seized their property, but decided to refrain from such extreme action. In fact, it held off taking any action at all for three weeks while the Sandinista government tried to persuade the Social Christians, the most important party in the group, to reconsider their position. They were adamant. And finally the Council enacted the law by stripping all three of their legal status. It means they can no longer hold open-air rallies, disseminate propaganda, or make political broadcasts, rights they had only recently begun to enjoy again after two years of suppression under a state of emergency.

I asked Mr. Ramiro Guldian (?), a spokesman for the coalition, if this would keep them entirely silent during the election campaign.

RAMIRO GULDIAN: You don't have to be in a campaign to be able to tell the whole Nicaraguan people who you think and

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what you think is going wrong in this country. The only thing, according to us, that they can do is to tell us that we cannot say, "Vote for us," because we are not -- you know, we're not registered to go to the election.

TOMLINSON: So, in other words, although you can't campaigning for votes, you can still take an active part in the political debate within the country.

GULDIAN: To us, that's our position.

TOMLINSON: The coalition is turning its attention to other countries involved in Central America's troubles in an effort to put pressure on the Sandinistas to postpone the elections scheduled for November the 4th and to enter into wide-ranging all-party talks instead.

The coalition's leader, Mr. Arturo Cruz, the man President Reagan would probably like to see at the head of a new Nicaraguan government, is in Costa Rica, where he has met with President Monge. While Mr. Monge made it clear he did not necessarily support Mr. Cruz's political ambitions, there was apparently agreement that the best way of solving Nicaragua's internal differences and to end the war with the U.S.-backed rebels, known as Contras, is by talking.

Mr. Cruz goes on to Venezuela and Colombia, two of the countries involved in the Contadora peace process, to seek their support.

LEE THORNTON: Along Nicaragua's borders, military forces, largely funded by the Central Intelligence Agency, have been fighting to topple the Sandinista government. Earlier this summer, Congress refused to give the CIA any more money for the forces, and some thought that would spell the end to the border fighting. But Reuters news agency reports CIA funding has not dried up, that one group along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border is still receiving money from the agency.

We asked Alfonso Caejos (?), a key civilian aide in the group, if the report is true.

ALFONSO CAEJOS: No, that's totally false. I would not guess who said that, but probably it was somebody who wants to hurt our crusade, hurt especially an American agency.

THORNTON: You are saying you're getting absolutely no money, then, from the CIA?

CAEJOS: Absolutely. We have received aid in the past, according to a law passed by Congress. And when the funds were

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terminated, there were no more funds, and that was it.

THORNTON: Where are you getting your money from? Are there countries sympathetic to your cause?

CAEJOS: Fortunately, there are many people, organizations, political organizations and civic organizations, in this world that still love freedom, and they're willing to help. And it hurts us, really, morally, to think that the Congress of the United States, a country that's supposed to be the leader of freedom and democracy in the world, did not approve additional aid to the freedom fighters in Nicaragua.

THORNTON: Could you tell us who some of those organizations, perhaps some of those countries, are?

CAEJOS: No. Unfortunately, I cannot. This is a covert operation.

THORNTON: What about your supplies? We wonder if the Honduran government is helping you to purchase aircraft, for example.

CAEJOS: Again, I cannot comment who's doing it. I can assure you that the Honduran government is not doing it.

THORNTON: Your forces. We understand they number about 12,000?

CAEJOS: That is correct.

THORNTON: Do you have adequate resources to keep them going, to continue to wage war?

CAEJOS: Well, you know, most of the support for the [unintelligible] are given by the Nicaraguan peasant populations. It's really very encouraging to receive the support as we are receiving from the Nicaraguan people. That's the only explanation why we have forces which are right at the heart of Nicaragua, in the middle of the country, to which we have no access. And they keep on fighting and waging this guerrilla war with the support of the Nicaraguan people.

THORNTON: Alfonso Caejos is a civilian leader of the Nicaraguan Democratic Front.